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Great teachers never die: they live on in the lives they have changed. Nicholas Henshall, who lost a long struggle with cancer on 16 September, shaped innumerable pupils in three decades as a history master at Stockport Grammar School. In retirement he reached still wider audiences with his writing and lecturing on his great passion, the culture and politics of eighteenth-century Europe.

Nick was the kind of committed, charismatic, and contrarian teacher everyone should be lucky enough to have at a formative age. As a ten-year-old, I had no idea how lucky I was. Indeed, I found his energy and eloquence more than a little frightening and certainly hard to absorb: his report on my first year briskly noted, "He works sensibly and carefully but is not very enterprising". That might have been enough to put anyone off history and to avoid "Mr Henshall" ever after. I stubbornly stuck with it and returned to his classroom for my A-Level. By then, I had a much better idea of Nick's talents. Thirty years of friendship only confirmed what an inspiration he was, resolute in discussion, endlessly curious and energetically

engaged until the cancer and the chemotherapy that kept it at bay together took their toll.

Born in Rugeley, Staffordshire, in 1944, Nick later moved to Stockport and became a pupil at the school where he would later teach. He read History at Cambridge and remained as passionately attached to his old college, Emmanuel, as he was to the Tudor century he studied there with Geoffrey Elton. That must have been a memorable encounter—the irascible meeting the implacable—and it left Nick with an inexhaustible knowledge of the Tudors but the desire to do research on a completely different period. He began a PhD on the possibility of revolution in late eighteenth-century Britain but gave it up after spending too long reeling microfilm in the bowels of Manchester University library (or so he always said). For the rest of his career, his head was with the Tudors and his heart was in the Enlightenment. The Age of Reason and the Age of Reformation were the twin poles of his teaching, but the eighteenth century was the source of most of his tastes and convictions.

Nick prepared all his classes, from the ascent of Henry VII to the downfall of Louis XVI, with a rigour that may have been lost on many of his pupils and a vigour none of them have forgotten. His notes—on fragrant purple cyclostyled sheets—were miracles of organisation and compression, larding apt quotations into beautifully structured summaries of the latest scholarship on economic, political, diplomatic and cultural history. (Social history always came some way behind: Nick's was always a history from above.) Hours before an exam, he could hand out copies of a new article on the Marian Privy Council and point to what we needed for our answers. Nick's talents—dedication, generosity, an infectious love of history—were more inspiring, and less intimidating, the longer you benefited from his teaching.

The effort Nick expended on his pupils, in and out of the classroom, was all-consuming but must have had a cost. He retired very early in 1997 to pursue history in other fashions but with undimmed passion. He had already published one major synthetic work, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern Monarchy* (1992) and was touchingly proud that his provocations stirred debate and that his pan-European reach, from Britain to Russia between the fifteenth and

the nineteenth centuries, earned the book translations into Italian and Russian. He held a Schoolmaster Fellowship at St John's College, Cambridge, while writing it and became a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society after its publication.

In retirement, he painstakingly but painfully wrote a sequel. *The Zenith of European Monarchy and its Elites: The Politics of Culture, 1650–1750* (2010) showcased his expansive erudition and distilled generations of scholarship on the cultural politics of power and the political power of culture. In the meantime, he also taught occasionally at the University of Manchester, wrote for *History Today* and edited *History Review*, its sibling magazine aimed squarely at sixth-formers. The highlight of his social calendar each year was the *History Today* January awards party.

Nick taught you how to think by showing you how to write. Grab the reader's attention. Keep sentences short and punchy. Avoid cliches like the plague (but never miss a good metaphor). Make every paragraph a miniature essay. And always say what you mean, even if you don't necessarily mean what you say. In short, he passed on the classical arts of rhetoric—after all, he taught at a 15th-century grammar school—combined with the Augustan virtues of Pope and Johnson, all laced with the wit of his great intellectual hero, Voltaire.

If I can turn a proper sentence, it's thanks to Nick. If I can make a halfway decent historical argument or hold my own in debate, that's his doing, too. And that I have enduring interests in early modern politics and culture is also his fault (or his achievement, given the very rough material he originally had to work with). Nick made me a historian and showed me why history matters. He also introduced me to Mozart's operas, Fielding's novels and the palace of Sanssouci—great gifts indeed, from a great teacher and friend. His loss is incalculable, but then so is his legacy.

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